CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
On Thursday, 19 February 1998, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Hofer (Switzerland)

GE.98-60514 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 785th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

As I take the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament as representative of Switzerland for the very first time, I would like at the outset to pay tribute to this institution, which, particularly at the beginning of the 1990s, achieved remarkable successes whose scope cannot be underestimated. I should also like to pay tribute to those who have made this success possible, and of course to those who, since then, in one way or another, have prepared the ground for, or inspired, my country's presidency. In this connection I should first like to mention my colleague Ambassador Lars Norberg and his staff on the delegation of Sweden, who, in a difficult situation, did everything in their power to move the deliberations of the Conference forward. I include the new representatives, whose useful imagination has already had a positive impact on our work. Finally, I should like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and his team for providing us with valuable counsel for the pursuit of our task.

My Government has not forgotten the States and the figures behind the favourable circumstances which brought Switzerland into the alphabetical order of members of the Conference and which, after only 20 months, have placed it in the presidency. At that time, vision, perseverance and especially the ability and the will to pursue dialogue were needed to arrive at this happy outcome. Despite a profoundly different environment, your President believes that these self-same qualities are of particular importance today. In recalling the wider context in which we now find ourselves, we observe that, during an initial phase, all the members of the Conference had ample opportunity to put forward their positions - and their proposals - as regards the future work of the Conference. This process kept us busy throughout the whole of 1997. Then, following the initiatives taken by the Presidents from Sri Lanka and Sweden, we entered a second phase of identification of specific subjects. Thanks to the consultations initiated by Ambassador Norberg in particular, the foundations were laid for a third phase, which has already been grafted onto our deliberations last week. Logically this is the phase which includes the search for areas of understanding and dialogue on the basis of our respective positions, which have become widely known, and the specific sensitivities discovered in the course of the second stage.

Consequently there is no doubt that we are entering a very delicate period. On the one hand it is characterized by many pitfalls: a refusal to engage in dialogue or a change in the political environment in which we find ourselves may delay the solutions that we all seek, or even jeopardize the tacit achievements of our earlier negotiations. On the other, this third phase is full of promise and hope: most of the subjects we have identified enjoy a wide measure of support. Some are even close to consensus: hence it will be for the incoming President to draw upon the creativity of all delegations to use the vast array of tools of multilateral dialogue designed to overcome the final obstacles so as to adopt at last negotiating topics which can place this Conference back on the track of working by consensus.

(The President)

This is why Switzerland considers its presidency as a service that it has the honour to render the Conference on Disarmament, in the interest of a common search for areas of understanding and open and imaginative negotiations, whilst maintaining all necessary transparency in respect of all the members of our institution. This approach should enable us to guarantee continuity in our work and to preserve the momentum initiated under the Swedish presidency. Stress will therefore be placed clearly on the substance of our items as presented in the final conclusions of my predecessor at the plenary meeting on 12 February 1998. At the same time I shall bear in mind the need to continue work concerning our institutional reforms, which are still pending. Your suggestions in this connection will be welcome. It is quite obvious that the Chair can only stimulate this process, whose results depend entirely on the political will of all the sovereign members of the Conference on Disarmament. We are convinced that sooner or later the Conference will have no alternative if it wishes to retain its role in the international community - no alternative but to succeed in the interests of all its members and all those who so far have not been able to become its fully-fledged members. It is in this spirit that I should like to thank you in advance for your support and your valuable efforts to revitalize our Conference and to restore to it its vocation as a multilateral negotiating body in the area of disarmament. I am fully aware of the difficulty of this task, but I undertake to devote all my energy to it, in the assurance that I can count on the cooperation of one and all.

On the list of speakers today I have the representatives of Chile, Germany, Italy and Poland. Before calling upon them I should like to inform you that I intend, as soon as we reach the end of the list of speakers, to submit to the Conference for decision the requests made by Saudi Arabia, Costa Rica and Sudan to participate as observers in our work in the course of 1998. I now invite the representative of Chile, Ambassador Illanes, to make his statement.

Mr. ILLANES (Chile) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first of all I wish to congratulate you on behalf of my delegation on occupying the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament and to offer you our full support and cooperation for the fulfilment of your important duties. The important statement you have just made reinforces our optimism that under your stewardship this Conference will be able to make progress. I also wish to avail myself of the opportunity to express our gratitude to your predecessor in this post, Ambassador Norberg of Sweden, for his remarkable performance. And also to convey our particular appreciation to the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and the Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, for the efficient work and services provided by the secretariat. My delegation also wishes on this occasion to extend a warm welcome to the new Ambassadors of China, the United States, India, Iran, Japan, the Netherlands, Peru and Sri Lanka who have recently joined the Conference.

The start of this session of the Conference on Disarmament has undoubtedly been more auspicious than last year's. Under the skilful guidance

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of Ambassador Norberg, the Conference succeeded in approving its agenda for this year without delay and, with regard to the programme of work, the President's gradual and prudent schedule of consultations led to two valuable results: firstly, the majority of delegations displayed a genuine willingness to be flexible in their positions in order to set the Conference on Disarmament on the path towards substantive work, and secondly it has been possible to reach "agreements in principle" about a variety of issues which could be addressed in the work of the present year. At this point, unfortunately, and in spite of the endeavours and the talent of the President of the Conference and many of its members, we find ourselves again in a situation which in practical terms differs little from the situation of deadlock that prevailed in 1997. The actual fact is that the Conference on Disarmament has not so far succeeded in reaching agreement on any decision concerning its own work.

It seems to me that in the CD we can all corroborate the fact that the main reason why we cannot manage to break out of the deadlock lies in the difficulty of reaching any kind of agreement about how to tackle the problem of nuclear disarmament. Chile's role as a member of the international community is characterized by its strict attachment to the principles which regulate peaceful coexistence among nations and the provisions of international law. From this standpoint we consider this forum, the only multilateral mechanism responsible for negotiations in disarmament affairs, to be of the highest importance, because of the fundamental role it has to play in generating agreements and rules which meet the rightful expectations harboured by the international community as a whole in this field. Thus, as a member of the Conference on Disarmament we feel responsible not only for our individual national interests but also for those of the community at large and we believe that the most efficient and active participation in this forum is the best way of duly fulfilling this obligation. In harmony with this position of principle, Chile has supported several initiatives, some of which were submitted in 1997 and others at the beginning of this session, that were designed to secure a start to negotiations that would include the question of nuclear disarmament. Chile therefore considers that the Conference should begin as soon as possible, with all the caution the matter calls for, but also with determination, to address this important issue. The foregoing in no way implies hampering or impairing the current process of bilateral or multilateral negotiations between the nuclear-weapon countries. We consider it essential to do our utmost to initiate, at the very least, as suggested by Canada and South Africa, judicious and reasonable deliberations. Chile resolutely supports those proposals.

We are above all pragmatic and realistic. We entertain no illusions, nor do we have any inclination to share intransigent positions. What we do want, however, is to continue doing whatever is within our modest means to make constructive contributions in this body. It is for that reason, again with regard to nuclear matters, that we favour a prompt start to the work of the ad hoc committee on a fissile material cut-off. Likewise we consider that this forum should address the subject of negative assurances. We feel that these negotiations, whatever the content and scope to be given them, beyond dealing with very important unresolved topics, would also, by their own logic,

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lead to the necessary multilateral discussion of nuclear disarmament. Faithful to the constructive spirit which inspires my country as a member of this forum, Chile has lent its support to several initiatives for a start to the substantive discussion of each of the items on the Conference agenda, on their own merits. Chile feels that a balanced programme of work for the CD should also include matters relating to conventional weapons, a sphere in which anti-personnel landmines clearly constitute the top priority for the world community. Undoubtedly the Ottawa Convention, which Chile too has signed, is intended to be universal, like many other international instruments. Unfortunately, this fundamental characteristic is viewed as an objective which is far from being achieved, because of the failure of many major countries to join the Ottawa Agreement. This is precisely where the Conference should once again respond to what the international community and international public opinion expect from an organ of this kind, by facilitating a gradual move towards achieving the final aim of the Convention.

I now wish to make reference to the item concerning the organization of our work, which has become a subject of the very highest importance in practical terms in the prevailing circumstances. In a letter addressed to the President of the Conference on Disarmament in December 1997, the delegation of Chile expressed its concern about the deadlock affecting the Conference on Disarmament and suggested certain steps of a procedural nature which could help remedy the situation. We pointed out to the President of the Conference that although such a situation was in itself a matter of substance, whose resolution depended mainly on political factors external to the CD, it was possible to imagine certain steps or commitments of a procedural nature and of limited scope that would be acceptable to all sectors. These could help to alleviate the situation and enable the CD to discuss disarmament issues without necessarily implying the existence of a will to initiate a negotiating process on an international convention. Therefore the statutory requirement of consensus would not be at all affected. In other words, once the Conference had adopted a balanced agenda covering the concerns of all delegations, the various items or sub-items on the agenda could be taken up, various technical issues could be addressed, delegations could present their own proposals for discussion, and so forth. However, there would be no mandate for negotiating a convention until it became perfectly clear that consensus had arisen on a specific item. In the opinion of the Chilean delegation, this could be achieved by setting up more or less permanent committees or working groups to deal with individual issues of interest to the CD, within the scope of the agenda items in CD/1484. These groups would work year after year, unless the Conference decided to modify or end their work, at the pace their members decided to adopt. When in any of these committees or working groups the existence of a consensus were to be sensed, the plenary would then appoint an ad hoc negotiating committee, this time with a specific mandate to move forward towards an international convention.

It could be objected that the purpose of the CD is essentially one of negotiating international agreements, while the prior discussing of issues is a task for the United Nations General Assembly or its Disarmament Commission. However, this is partly true. In the past history of the organs which preceded the CD there are instances of debates on complex disarmament issues

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which gave rise to ideas and meaningful contributions towards agreements that were finally arrived at bilaterally. Again, solutions were found to technical problems which substantially smoothed the way for the subsequent signing of very important multilateral conventions. Nowadays, in some measure, delegations take advantage of the plenary meetings of the CD to make statements of a general nature. However, the establishment of committees or working groups that would be more or less permanent would significantly increase the possibility for delegations of member countries to outline their positions, exchange views and proposals and reflect together with others in order to resolve their differences and achieve useful approaches to disarmament issues. We have taken the liberty of restating these ideas today in the hope that they may prove a constructive input to the debate that the CD is doubtless going to have in the near future concerning the most appropriate reforms to its rules of procedure designed to ensure its more efficient functioning. If, as we hope, the post of special coordinator on this subject is recreated, the Chilean delegation will submit specific proposals through that channel.

We should like to add now that there might be yet another way to achieve the same desired results with the ideas broached in my letter of December 1997, to which I have just referred. This would also consist of a purely procedural step which would not jeopardize the rule of consensus and which would perhaps be more easily acceptable as it is a much more modest proposal and one which would not even require amendment of our rules of procedure, since it could be readily implemented by means of a new interpretation (CD/1036 of 1990). I refer to our reaching agreement that the special coordinators (or Friends of the Chair) for agenda items could be appointed by the President of the Conference without the need to request specific agreement from members. The basis for this procedural course of action is to be found in the fact that the function of such colleagues is essentially one of consulting all the delegations about a given item, thus enabling them to present to the Conference a summary of such opinions in systematic form. In fact, this is a job which does not differ greatly from the function that is partially fulfilled by delegations' general statements made in the Conference plenary.

There is nothing in the work of the special coordinators that might commit Governments to negotiations, since the results of their endeavours will indicate whether or not there is any basis for an eventual negotiating process, which will normally depend on no objection arising from any member State. Indeed, these special coordinators would be quite similar to the "Friends of the Chair" who, as we all know, render extremely useful services in the great majority of United Nations institutions and bodies and in other forums. These Friends of the Chair, appointed by the President himself, enable him to enhance his own ability to conduct consultations, which is of necessity limited, and to move forward in obtaining useful information for the progress of the work of the relevant body without impairing the ultimate freedom of decision of each delegation. Obviously they should be given broad mandates to gather all kinds of opinions, mandates without any kind of bias which might tend to prejudge the results of their consultations. This stage

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of simple information-gathering would therefore not in the least - I repeat - modify the freedom of all delegations to accept or oppose the subsequent initiation of a negotiating process in an ad hoc committee.

The adoption of the procedural approach which we have ventured to suggest would allow us to move forward smoothly in the preliminary stage of gathering and exchanging ideas on disarmament issues, thus overcoming the difficulties we are encountering today in reaching agreement on the appointment of special coordinators. This would mark a substantial improvement in the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Chile for his statement and for the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I now call on the representative of Germany, Ambassador Seibert.

Mr. SEIBERT (Germany): Mr. President, I would like first to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency. We are glad to see you in the Chair since we appreciate your diplomatic skills and know that you will spare no effort to move this Conference forward to substantive work. My delegation will cooperate with you and fully supports your endeavours which you have just outlined in your introductory speech.

I also take this opportunity to express the gratitude of my delegation to your predecessor, Ambassador Norberg, for the circumspection and wisdom with which he has presided over this Conference. Under his able guidance much ground has been covered on the way to preparing decisions. While further consultations may be necessary on some items, it is now for the Conference to live up to its responsibilities and take the necessary decisions.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of this Conference, Mr. Petrovsky, and Mr. Bensmail, Deputy Secretary-General, as well as the entire secretariat for their valuable support.

Let me first briefly outline some views in the area of global disarmament and arms control. Germany is committed to the inter-dependent goals of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation as set out in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in the "Principles and objectives" on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament as decided by the 1995 Review Conference. We, like others, do believe that the primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament remains with the nuclear-weapon States.

There is no practicable alternative to the ongoing START process. These negotiations may have been at times complex and protracted, but they have undeniably yielded important results such as the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF), START I and START II agreements. While implementation of START I seems to advance smoothly and according to timetable, START II has unfortunately not yet entered into force. Germany welcomes the various understandings reached between Russia and the United States of America in the course of last year to clarify the way ahead. Negotiations on START III should commence immediately after START II is in force. START III should aim at further deep reductions in strategic nuclear arsenals. Germany welcomes in

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particular the intention of both parties to discuss in separate but parallel talks tactical nuclear weapons which so far are only subject to unilateral declarations made in 1991-1992.

We believe that the insistence on a time-bound framework for nuclear disarmament is not helpful. Who can presume to define here and now all the answers to all the political, technical and financial problems involved? There can be no doubt that the way towards elimination lies in the direction of steady, continued reductions.

Emphasizing the primary responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States does not mean that the CD has no role to play in questions of nuclear disarmament or nuclear arms control. All nations have a natural interest in nuclear arms control. It is therefore appropriate for this Conference to consider issues of nuclear disarmament and arms control. Such considerations could complement and support ongoing efforts by the nuclear-weapon States. Non-nuclear-weapon States have a legitimate interest in being informed about progress achieved and possible challenges in the process of nuclear disarmament. We believe that this Conference could find ways to address issues of nuclear disarmament in a structured and focused manner. Such an approach would allow a free exchange of information and ideas, and would enhance transparency and confidence. It would lead to a more relevant debate which would serve all delegations. We, for our part, are not tied to any specific mechanisms in which such discussions could take place.

Discussions on nuclear disarmament will reveal that some issues are ripe for negotiation while others are not. Among the issues which must be urgently addressed by the CD is a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). After the conclusion of the CTBT, a non-discriminatory and effectively verifiable cut-off treaty would constitute a major contribution both to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The Shannon report, based on very extensive and in-depth consultations in this Conference, constitutes a solid basis for such negotiations. It also provides the necessary flexibility for delegations to raise all matters of legitimate concern in such negotiations. If some delegations feel that developments since 1995 require a re-examination of the context in which the mandate has been set, we are ready to explore the line of thought developed by Canada in its recent working paper. However, this should not stand in the way of commencement of substantive work in an ad hoc committee or, if necessary, in a less formal setting.

The issue of anti-personnel landmines (APLs) has been a top priority for my country and for many others. The Ottawa process has paved the way for an adequate and definite solution to the APL issue. Germany will continue to make every effort to contribute to the universalization, early entry into force and complete implementation of the Ottawa Convention. We are willing to enter into a constructive dialogue with those countries that do not yet feel able to sign the Ottawa Convention but are willing to consider intermediate steps to promote the ultimate goal of the universal and total prohibition of anti-personnel mines. Germany hopes that one of those intermediate steps, the entry into force of the revised Protocol II of the CCW, can be taken as soon as possible.

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This Conference has before it General Assembly resolution 52/38 H, inviting the Conference on Disarmament "to intensify its efforts on the issue of anti-personnel landmines". The international community deserves an early and adequate response by this Conference. One way to do this would be to start negotiations on a global ban on the transfer, including the export and import of anti-personnel landmines. A considerable number of delegations have already indicated their support for such an approach. Germany is prepared to actively participate in negotiations on a transfer ban which must be global, complete and effective. Above all, it must be complementary to the Ottawa Convention, which, in our view, is the principal legal instrument on the APL issue. Since the Ottawa Convention is binding for its signatory States, negotiations in the CD cannot fall behind the Ottawa standards and definitions.

An ad hoc committee to begin negotiations should be established immediately. If some delegations feel that more time is needed to define the mandate for such negotiations, we could also agree to reappoint a special co-ordinator who would be mandated to present an early report on possible concrete steps towards an APL transfer ban.

Germany would also like to see the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments (TIA). We fully support the suggestions made on this issue by the distinguished Ambassador of the Netherlands. Although constructive and fruitful discussions took place in the Committee in 1993 and 1994, only modest progress has been made in the field of transparency since then. The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, as the only global instrument related to transparency of conventional weapons, is still confined to weapons transfers only. Nobody can deny, however, that an excessive and destabilizing accumulation of weapons can result also from procurements based on national production capabilities. Likewise, reporting of military holdings would significantly contribute to signalling openness in military matters and, thereby, to building confidence. Furthermore, the reporting in many cases lacks clarity since it contains only cumulative numbers of unspecified weapons within broadly defined weapon categories. In this respect, we welcome the suggestion made by the United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts in its 1997 report to also include information on types or models of weapons in the annual reporting.

However, the fact that many States, including Germany, voluntarily provide all this information is not enough to secure universal acceptance. Thus, the time has come to study ways and means of improving transparency on a global scale, not only with respect to enhancing the Register but also regarding other appropriate measures. In this context, Germany also attaches high importance to the United Nations standardized reporting system on military expenditures, which is not limited to specific categories of weapons but gives a more general overview on national defence policies.

In our view, the CD is the most appropriate body to take on seriously all questions related to transparency on a global scale. The CD should make every effort in the current session to achieve progress in this field.

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We also believe that the Conference must considerably strengthen its efforts in the field of conventional disarmament, an issue that has been dealt with so far only by the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments. Conventional disarmament is not only one of the items of the so-called "Decalogue"; it has also been recognized as one of the disarmament priorities by the first special session of the General Assembly on disarmament. And above all, conventional weapons are the weapons being used in most conflicts of our times.

In this context, we welcome the ideas on this subject presented by Canada and Mexico. We particularly recognize the need for appropriate measures to reduce significantly the uncontrolled stream of small arms and light weapons in crisis or conflict areas. However, we are aware of the complexity of this subject, which involves basic principles of international law such as legitimate self-defence, as well as national legislation and suitable approaches to conflict solution and consolidation of peace. We regard the 1997 report of the group of governmental experts on small arms and light weapons as a very useful contribution to this discussion, and thank its Chairman, Ambassador Donowaki, for his able guidance. We support the continuation of the deliberations on the issue on an expert level.

Several delegations have expressed particular interest in the subjects of outer space and negative security assurances. Both subjects have been dealt with in the Conference before.

On outer-space, Germany has actively participated in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee and has repeatedly contributed expertise and concrete proposals. After several years of discussion, however, the Committee was still not in a position to agree upon a negotiating mandate as had been proposed by my predecessor, Ambassador Hoffmann, as Chairman of the Committee in 1993. That is why it would seem to us that some additional discussion would be needed to identify potential new developments and possible new approaches in this area which might usefully be addressed in an ad hoc committee. Canada has already made a valuable contribution to such a discussion. At the very least, there should be a review of the mandate, as foreseen in General Assembly resolution 52/37.

The first Ad Hoc Committee established by the CD in 1979 was the Committee on negative security assurances (NSA), which dealt with this topic and continued to do so, on the basis of the unchanged negotiating mandate of 1979, until 1994. We believe that this reflects a legitimate security concern of non-nuclear-weapon States and that, therefore, the question of security assurances must remain on the international agenda. Here also, we should have a substantial discussion on how to develop new and more promising approaches. This could be done either by establishing an ad hoc committee or, failing agreement, by appointing a special co-ordinator.

I have set out some of our positions for this year's session. I have done so because we believe that this Conference can do more meaningful work on some subjects. We are ready to look with an open and constructive mind at the priorities of other delegations and are willing to seek compromises. In a

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body based on the rule of consensus, this is the only way to move forward. We therefore do hope that all delegations will have one priority in common: to get this Conference back to substantial discussions and real negotiations as soon as possible.

My delegation is ready to accept ad hoc committees on any item where this is possible and to nominate special co-ordinators where it is necessary. We are also open with regard to the framework or mechanism in which meaningful, substantive discussions may take place.

Mr. President, in his concluding remarks your predecessor rightly pointed to the new and positive atmosphere prevailing in this year's session. We share this assessment. At the same time we believe that a good atmosphere is not an end in itself. It must translate into tangible progress and concrete decisions.

After four weeks of formal debates and informal consultations, the Conference is now at the crossroads where it will have to decide whether it will repeat last year's dismal performance or whether it will engage in substantive work. My delegation is strongly committed to embark on the latter avenue. We trust that you will steer this Conference in the right direction and you may count on my delegation's full support in this endeavour.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Germany for his statement and for the kind words he addressed to me. I now call on the representative of Italy, Mr. Picheca.

Mr. PICHECA (Italy): My Ambassador apologizes for not being able to be present today, but unfortunately, he is suffering from the flu. I am honoured to replace him.

Mr. President, first of all, I wish to express to you the representative of a country with which Italy maintains the most cordial relations, my best congratulations on your assumption of the Chair of this Conference and sincere wishes for a successful mission at this difficult moment. I should also like to voice our most sincere appreciation for the skilful, balanced and effective activity of your predecessor, Ambassador Lars Norberg, and for his statement at the end of his office containing many useful concluding remarks. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General, Vladimir Petrovsky, and his deputy, Abdelkader Bensmail, who are making an outstanding contribution to the smooth running of our Conference. I would also like to address to colleagues who have begun their work in Geneva my warmest expressions of welcome and wishes for the fulfilment of their duties.

The Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lamberto Dini, when taking part in the inaugural debate of the last session, did not fail to address a fervent appeal to all member countries to overcome ideological confrontations and other aprioristic attitudes which seem to be the basic obstacle to the fruitful development of our activity.

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Last year no steps forward were made even if the expertise of the Geneva forum was fruitful in the area of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons.

Since negotiating initiatives seemed impossible the Conference had to limit its activity to a constant political confrontation and could only reach, as the sole result, the appointment of four Special Coordinators.

An international organization which no longer believes in its own ability to improve its own standards is inevitably condemned to give up its activity. We do not believe that this is the case of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Italian Government, throughout the history of its foreign policy, has underlined the importance it attaches to disarmament, which is a central feature of its security policy. In this context, we sustain the role of the Conference.

The difficulties in negotiating, and the obstacles in reaching, further agreements which could be added to those that have been signed to date are of an increasingly political nature.

We have been discussing for more than a year, during which we have left sufficient room for an open confrontation of different views. It is now time, albeit without denying full respect of every national position, to find a minimum common denominator on which the best solution for the successful results of our endeavours can be achieved.

Italy takes its place, without any doubt whatsoever, among the countries that support the process of nuclear disarmament with a final goal of achieving the complete elimination of all such armaments.

We have already undertaken steps in that direction, assuming our full responsibility in the negotiations leading to the banning and destruction of all intermediate-range nuclear forces, and we are equally committed today.

No one can deny that important results have been achieved in recent years and, apart from that, we believe that the path to nuclear disarmament is now clearly defined. We do understand the impatience shown by certain States in our forum regarding nuclear disarmament. We are convinced, however, that the problem cannot be solved by merely issuing fine-sounding declarations or pronouncing solemn ultimatums which will not lead to any positive results.

During the last weeks some proposals have been brought to our attention, and we have examined them carefully. We have appreciated the spirit of the South African proposal. Its concepts have been articulated in an appealing way. The authority of this initiative stems from the fact that it has been presented by a country which has adopted in this delicate issue a clear political line, through decisions that have been an honour to South Africa. But we must also immediately clearly state that if the proposal foresees the

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objective of a multilateralization of the nuclear disarmament negotiations, we will not be able to support it, as it may turn out to be a dangerous illusion. We do not think that the Conference should provide for a multilateral negotiating table aimed at reducing nuclear weapons. It could and should instead stimulate the ongoing nuclear disarmament process, drawing persistently the attention of nuclear countries and others to complying with the commitments undertaken under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We welcome and support the proposal presented by Belgium on 12 February, containing clear and stimulating elements on the way towards nuclear disarmament which could offer, with those improvements deemed necessary, a valuable contribution in terms of further considerations on this delicate and important working agenda item.

I would like to recall in this matter that consideration of issues and in-depth assessments are a preliminary and necessary exercise which precedes the tabling of any initiative and negotiating proposal. And it is for this reason that, after the conceptual endeavours and contributions achieved in preceding years, we consider a negotiation on the prohibition of fissile material production for military use ("cut-off") to be ripe. The immediate re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee established in 1995 is then logical, and we are ready to discuss it on the basis of the documents and proposals submitted for our attention on 21 January by Ambassador Moher. It is inconceivable to permit fissile materials to be manufactured while nuclear tests are being banned and existing fissile material is being destroyed. But "cut-off" is only the first in a series of measures set out in the "Principles and objectives" document agreed at the Review and Extension Conference of the NPT. In the view of the Italian Government, this document is in itself a plan of action for nuclear disarmament over the next few years. Some of the most promising goals that still lie ahead are the following: consolidating and extending the denuclearized zones, especially in areas of tension; strengthening negative and positive security assurances to benefit States that fully comply with the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty; extending and enhancing the IAEA safeguards in order to detect and prevent more effectively any possible undeclared nuclear activity.

Other issues have been considered in the past weeks and we have had the opportunity to express the opinion of the Italian delegation in the informal consultations. I refer mainly to the issue of transparency in armaments and to the proposal which was presented by Ambassador Majoor for the appointment of a special coordinator that we intend to support.

Another indisputable objective in the work of the Conference concerns conventional disarmament. In this field we consider that there are some issues that are ripe for negotiation.

The initiative for a ban on anti-personnel landmines has acquired an eloquent meaning. In Ottawa, Italy signed the "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction", and is carrying out the required procedures for its ratification. On 29 October last, the Italian Parliament passed one of the most advanced pieces of legislation on this matter. Now we must promote universal adherence to the Convention and to its objectives by calling on

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those Governments and the public opinion of those countries that have not decided to adhere to the Ottawa principles. It is for this reason that we also agreed with other countries belonging to other regional groups asking for the reappointment of a special coordinator to continue consultations in the CD, in fulfilment of resolution 52/38 H adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Only a very few countries have so far ratified the Ottawa Convention. We must not allow the interest of the international community on this issue to lose momentum. The above-mentioned proposal, contained in document CD/1495, is, in our opinion, an important contribution to that end.

We must continue focusing on this issue for moral and humanitarian reasons, also in the interest of the economic development of large areas that need to be cleared from those insidious and infamous weapons that affect so many innocents. As President Clinton said, "Our children deserve to walk the Earth in safety".

The Italian Government, answering calls from the civil population and the forces representing them, intends to contribute to defining codes of conduct setting up the rules of international coexistence and guaranteeing their respect through the appropriate instruments. In the last days, concrete proposals have been presented in the context of the European Union, to which we belong, so that arms and military equipment experts - for which the Union is drafting its own code of conduct - respond to the criteria and standards which provide, under certain conditions, for the prohibition of exporting imported arms, the prohibition of exports with respect to countries responsible for serious violations of international agreements safeguarding human rights or towards those States who intend to hoard military equipment beyond their legitimate security and national defence requirements, and so forth. We also intend to pursue in our forum objectives allowing us to move from values to written rules, from principles to procedures, from claims to rights. For these reasons, we deem it necessary to continue to consider the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. A realistic approach to this issue should start from what has been done in previous years and consider follow-up to the subject, such as important measures for developing mutual trust in international relations. For this reason, we welcome the document submitted by the Canadian delegation.

I would also like to say a few words on the subject of the interna corporis, that is, the whole set of principles and rules of procedure which can render our debate more useful, our consultations easier and the subjects we must deal with clearer, thus making our Conference more representative of the members of the international community. For this reason, we are in favour of the reappointment of the three reform Coordinators on the agenda, the expansion and the improved and effective functioning of the Conference.

Mr. President, Italy, as one of its founding members, looks on the activity of the Conference with great hope and confidence, the same hope and confidence that we nourish for your activity as President of the Conference, hoping that your presidency will be as fruitful as possible and assuring you the full cooperation of the Italian delegation.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Italy for his statement and for the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I now call on the representative of Poland, Ambassador Jakubowski.

Mr. JAKUBOWSKI (Poland): Mr. President, allow me first to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. It is a pleasure for me to take the floor when the Conference on Disarmament, for the first time ever, is not only hosted by Switzerland but has its helm in the able hands of a distinguished Swiss diplomat.

My delegation is confident, and there are good reasons for our confidence, that under Swiss leadership the difficulties facing the CD at this crucial juncture will soon come to a positive resolution. These reasons include the long and close cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Swiss Confederation within the context, first of the Conference, now of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the traditional dedication of Switzerland to disarmament, international security and to humanitarian causes worldwide. You will have, Mr. President, full cooperation and support of my delegation in the discharge of your mandate.

Let me also express appreciation to your distinguished predecessor, Ambassador Lars Norberg of Sweden, for the perseverance and skill with which he sought to resolve the problems of the CD agenda and its work programme.

I have asked for the floor in connection with a further exchange of views on APL within the context of issues raised during the plenary of 12 February.

Bearing in mind the important support which has further emerged for the appointment of a special coordinator on APL, on the one hand, and the questions still voiced by some delegations, on the other, I should like to offer some additional comments on behalf of a group of like-minded States.

We assume that the overall, general task of the coordinator would be to try to explore and establish the views of CD members on what the Conference on Disarmament may usefully do to promote the broader objective of a worldwide, effective prohibition of APL. As we stated last week, the pursuit of a global APL export/import ban in the CD would represent an important step in that direction. Last week, we were asked why the CD should address this issue. We believe the reason is simple: such a ban would have the support and participation of the main producers of APLs and would move the world one step further toward a global solution of the landmine crisis.

As we certainly appreciate, a large portion of the APLs underlying the current humanitarian crisis were not manufactured in the countries in which they were emplaced. If we stop the flow of APLs between countries, we will significantly reduce the availability of APLs that cause the humanitarian problem. Last week, we were asked why it was necessary to negotiate a third APL instrument. We are persuaded that APL negotiations centring on this aspect of the APL problem would make a useful contribution to the existing regimes. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) establishes

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controls on certain APL transfers, whilst the Ottawa Convention does not capture many of the States key to effectively reducing the flow of APLs between countries. The legal regime which the international community is erecting against APLs can only be strengthened by such a ban.

We therefore have no doubt that the CD needs to address APLs quickly. The simple reason is that casualties mount on a daily basis. As will be recalled, this was the key motivation behind efforts to begin negotiations in the CD last year as well as the Ottawa Convention. Then there is the indisputable fact that the CD can act now. Regarding CCW Protocol II, we reaffirm the great value we attach to its ratification and early entry into force. We have no objection to making full use of this instrument as appropriate, but we are concerned about time lines and procedural practicalities.

The more time which elapses before this issue is addressed, the more victims of APLs there will be. Last week we were asked whether a fifth Protocol to the CCW would resolve this problem. To begin negotiations within the framework of the CCW Convention, a majority of the High Contracting Parties has to agree to a Conference to amend the Convention either by negotiation of a Protocol V or by amending Protocol II. This is likely to take time.

Contrary to some views, a treaty negotiated in the CD does not have to take a significant amount of time. Although each treaty is unique in its own way, there is, in this case, a precedent on which negotiations could draw. However, we do not want to prejudge in any way the exact appearance of a final treaty before we have begun negotiations.

We have been asked also if such an instrument would have an impact on definitions or on legal obligations arising under related instruments such as the Ottawa Convention or the amended Protocol II, or on efforts towards the universalization of such related instruments. I would just like to stress in this regard that a vast majority of States which are presently calling for reappointment of a special coordinator and the start of negotiations have signed both the Ottawa Convention and amended Protocol II. Obviously, no State would promote any agreement that would contradict its obligations under such related instruments.

So that this process can begin, we urge the reappointment of a special coordinator as soon as possible.

The PRESIDENT: (translated from French): I thank the representative of Poland for his statement and for the kind words he addressed to the Chair, and particularly to my country.

As you know, Ambassador Gregori Berdennikov of the Russian Federation is soon to be leaving his post in the Conference to take over as Director of the Disarmament Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow. He has represented his Government at the Conference for over five years, in the course of which he has made an invaluable contribution to our work. He had

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the opportunity to take an active part in the negotiations that led to the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty. I should therefore like, on behalf of us all, to wish him success in his new duties and happiness in his personal life, in the certainty that in another role he will continue to inspire our work. Ambassador Berdennikov, you have the floor, Sir.

Mr. BERDENNIKOV (Russian Federation) (translated from Russian): Mr. President, first of all I should like to congratulate you on taking up the duties of President of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you success in this responsible post. In your person the representative of a non-member State of the United Nations has become the President of the CD for the first time. This is yet one more confirmation of the fact that the CD is an independent negotiating forum with its own rules of procedure, and not a United Nations body. I should also like to express my gratitude to your predecessor, the distinguished Ambassador of Sweden, Lars Norberg. In his brief period as President he was able to achieve almost as much as it took the Conference the entire preceding year of 1997 to achieve. Now we already have an agenda, and the CD can focus on what practical work should be done within its framework.

My mission at the Conference has come to an end. Today I have asked for the floor to thank you, Mr. President, for the warm words you addressed to me, and all my distinguished colleagues and staff of the secretariat of the Conference for their kindness and cooperation towards me personally and the Russian delegation as a whole over the four and a half years during which I have had the honour to represent Russia at the CD. If I add to this five years of work here in the 1980s, I have been linked with the CD for almost 10 years. I recall when I joined the Disarmament Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1970s the disarmament veterans said half-jokingly, "In our work it is only the first 10 years that are difficult. After that, no problem - you'll get used to it." Now, on the basis of experience, I can confirm that they were right, although the figure they cited was perhaps somewhat on the low side. In this connection, I cannot help remembering my senior colleagues, the Russian diplomats and disarmament experts with whom I had the good fortune to work directly and who I consider my teachers, towards whom I experience a feeling of profound gratitude and respect - Ambassadors Viktor Karpov, Viktor Issraelyan, Roland Timerbaev, Yuri Nazarkin and also, of course, Vladimir Petrovsky, the current Secretary-General of the CD.

I am certain that the negotiating body in which such important instruments for the maintenance of peace and international security as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and others were developed merits every support. I consider that the CD should resume practical work on such issues as the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, the worldwide prohibition of anti-personnel mines, starting with a ban on their export and import, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, "negative" assurances, and so on. Looking forward to when we come to the practical realization of the ultimate

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goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons, multilateral negotiations on an international agreement on the subject will obviously also become essential. In the meantime, however, matters have not reached that stage, and now it is essential to do our utmost to advance the process of reduction and limitation of strategic offensive weapons in accordance with the bilateral agreements that have already been reached and have received the support of the international community.

My future work in Moscow, I hope, will give me an opportunity to follow developments at the Conference on Disarmament carefully. As at present, we are going to do our utmost in order to further constructive work by this unique negotiating body. Our Conference does not operate in a vacuum. And this is why it is especially regrettable that the CD has become bogged down now, when there are no external factors complicating its work - the "cold war" confrontation is behind us, and there are no local "hot" wars. If - God forbid - this situation changes and trouble breaks out somewhere in the world, I think we shall all recall this period as a time of missed opportunities.

Allow me to wish you and all our colleagues success, most importantly in moving beyond the current difficult period in the CD's activity as soon as possible. I think there are grounds for hoping that procedural issues will finally cease to constitute the substance of its work.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank Ambassador Berdennikov for his statement. Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor? As there are not, I shall now put to the Conference for decision the requests made by Saudi Arabia, Costa Rica and Sudan to participate as observers in the work of the Conference in 1998. You have before you these requests with a covering note from the President issued as document CD/WP.495. Do these requests meet with the Conference's approval?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 26 February at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.